Erodium maritimum (L.) L'Hér. (Sea Stork's-bill)

vc15

Rarity / scarcity status

The core distributional range of Sea Stork's-bill in the British Isles is along the British west coast northwards to the Rhinns of Galloway and southwards to Cornwall, thence to Dorset with a few outliers further east. It is also on the east and south coasts of Ireland. Although it had been noted as a species in marked decline in south east England[27], there appear to be no conservation concerns, its risk status being one of 'Least Concern' both for England and for Great Britain as a whole. Kent is one of the eastern outliers, and so on the fringes of British distribution; the species is **scarce** in the county.

Account

Erodium maritimum was first recorded in Kent by Edward Jacobs in his *Plantae Favershamienses* (1777) as present "*On the Sand Downs near* Deal – *not common*". The likelihood is that this record was a contribution by William Boys, the historian of Sandwich. It was later listed by Lewis Dillwyn as "Found by my friend, Joseph Woods, jun. and myself on the walls of Sandgate Castle" in *his Catalogue of the more rare Plants found in the Environs of Dover, with occasional Remarks* presented to the Linnean Society in 1801 and appearing in their 1802 Transactions.

Dungeness. Photos by Lliam Rooney, 20 July 2010

After this, nothing was heard of the plant until recent years, although Hanbury and Marshall (1899) were hopeful that careful search at Deal might be successful. In 1996, however, it was rediscovered on sandy tracks on the Dungeness RSPB reserve (TR0618) and since then it has spread prolifically along paths in the reserve, being recorded in thousands, and from 2010 began to be observed in other locations. By 2012 it was also known not far from the original location, having been found in monads TR0619, TR0716 and TR0817, but additionally had been recorded further afield in a car park on secure MoD land at Lydd Ranges, TR0320. By 2017, it had been found in seven tetrads (ten monads), including an anomalous inland record at Hothfield, where it appeared either from imported sand or from a scraped-up car park surface to which it may have travelled with visitors from the Dungeness reserve. This is the current total for 2010-22 records.

Although the species is known in other parts of the British Isles from sea cliffs and sand dunes, the south east Kent plants inhabit low-lying compacted shingle or sand/shingle surfaces of car parking or paths where they grow with a prostrate, flattened habit. The very small size of this annual renders it susceptible to over-shading competition and little else grows with it in its trampled environment. It is probably self-pollinating and, without a need to attract pollinators, often lacks petals or drops them readily (see illustrations above).

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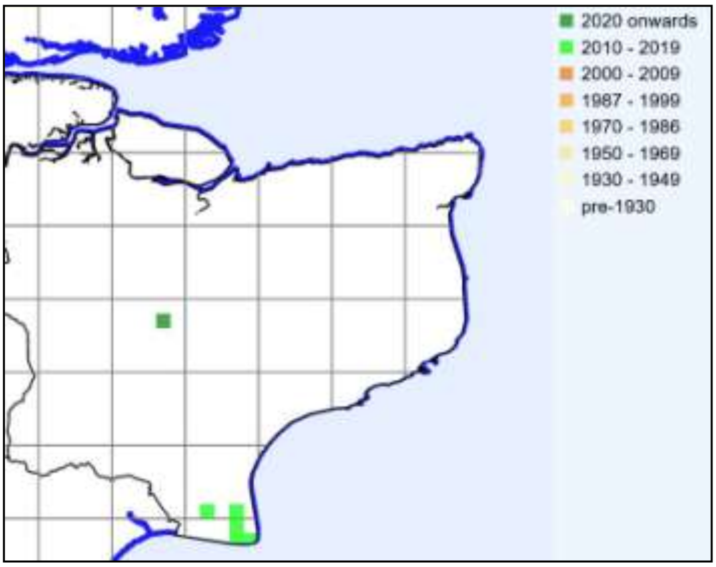
[27] Walker, K.J. (2007). The last thirty-five years: recent changes in the flora of the Britih Isles. *Watsonia* **26**: 291-302.



***Erodium maritimum* Kent records to 2022 mapped at tetrad level, from BSBI database.**

Although Sea Stork's-bill was native to Kent, it is likely that its appearance on the RSPB reserve is as a result of seed being brought inadvertently on footwear or car tyres of a birdwatcher from a coastal site in western Britain. Normal dispersal for the seeds of *Erodium* spp. is by explosive release and self-burial, but Sea Stork's-bill's spread along paths suggests that seeds are readily capable of being picked up with wet sand and gravel on footwear.

Dungeness. Photo by Sue Buckingham, 20 August 2011

Site	Grid reference	Site status	Last record date	Recorder	Comments
Hothfield	TQ9746	SSSI	8 August 2017	HS	TQ 9705 4600, over 20 plants (spreading along sandy bank which was constructed 2013 (info per Ian Rickard, KWT) when the adjoining land ceased to be a car park, at which point the tarmac/gravel surface was scraped off and used to create this bank. Two or three years later a neighbour supplemented it with additional sandy material.
Lydd Ranges	TR0320	MoD land	(1) 7 August 2012 (2) 8 August 2012	(1) OL, GK, TI & SB (2) SB & TI	(1) At car park, Lydd Camp. (2) Many plants at edge of road by MOD car park TR 03477 20013.
Dungeness	TR0617		10 August 2013	TI	
Dungeness RSPB reserve	TR0618	RSPB reserve, SSSI	(1) 29 September 2017 (2) 23 June 2010 (3) 3 June 2010	(1) BBe (2)SB (3) DG (4) RG	This monad has been the subject of records by many recorders since 1996 to (at least) 2012, and a selection is given here.

			(4) 16 November 2007 (5) 29 April 1999	(5) EGP	(1) TR 06774 18442, RSPB car park, a few plants. (2) TR 067 181 to TR 067 184, thousands of plants. (3) TR 067 184, in car park and on paths throughout the reserve. (4) TR 065 185, TR 066 184, TR 067 184. (5) Location given as TR01U.
Dungeness	TR0619	Mostly SSSI	(1) 1 May 2019 (2) June 2014 (3) 18 April 2011 (4) 15 June 2010	(1) AW (2) FJR (3) SB (4) GK	(1) TR0619 (2) TR 0628 1944, TR 0625 1962, TR 0625 1963, TR 0624 1962, TR 0623 1960, TR 0622 1960. (3) On shingle at TR 06420 19490. (4) ARC site..
West of Lade	TR0620		(1) June 2014 (2) 30 June 2012	(1) FJR (2) TI	(1) TR 06840 20140, c.10 plants, and TR 06796 20168.
Near Dungeness power station	TR0716	SSSI	(1) 15 September 2017 (2) 22 June 2014 (3) 20 August 2011	(1) BBe (2) BW (3) SB	(1) TR 07361 16673, large patch at least 30 x 10m. (2) – (3) TR 07754 16647, abundant on sand and shingle on both sides of concrete road westwards for 600 metres.
Dungeness power station	TR0717		22 June 2014	KBRG meeting	Growing abundantly on the sandy margins of the power station car park.
West of Lade	TR0720		15 June 2013	TI	
Dungeness	TR0817	Mostly SSSI	(1) 4 June 2011 (2) 14 May 2005	(1) TI (2) JS	(1) TR 081 177. (2) TR 08525 17266, 109 plants confined to small area (1 sq metre) by Bird Observatory.